

# BVU: what new services will it offer students?

Dear editor,

I read with some surprise the newly founded British Veterinary Union (BVU) is aiming to enlist veterinary students to its membership (August 1 issue). Veterinary students in the UK and Ireland already have access to three bodies of representation: the Association of Veterinary Students of Great Britain and Ireland (AVS); the BVA; and the National Union of Students (NUS). To the best of my knowledge, Dr Mir has not approached any of these bodies to find out the level of support already available to students, or the additional services they feel they need.

The AVS represents more than 4,000 veterinary students across all eight veterinary schools in the UK and Ireland. Members receive welfare, educational, and financial advice through AVS' website and other media. They have access to the *Journal for the Association of Veterinary Students (JAVS)*, which is published biannually and has supplementary editions for freshers, and are provided with support materials for extramural studies (EMS) through the journal. Members of the AVS receive representation to the BVA, the RCVS and Government through our central committee, and representation to their own universities through their two school representatives. Additionally, the AVS provides social gatherings, such as a sports weekend and a congress – events that many *Veterinary Times* readers will have been involved in during their student days.

The BVA provides a great deal of support directly to the AVS, which we aim to pass on to our members. Most of our members (more than 3,000) are also BVA student members, so they receive all the support and benefits that membership entails, including mediation services, travel grants, EMS guides and insurance. They also receive the continuity of support from the Young Vet Network, including the graduate guide it has just completed. The BVA has worked extremely hard to ensure the peculiarity of the veterinary course (five to six years in length, with the added financial pressures of EMS) is not forgotten during the higher education review, and it succeeded in pushing for special recommendations for long courses being made in the *Hughes Report*.

The AVS has been working with BVA on the issues of student debt and access to higher education, as well as student welfare, and we have been active in promoting Vetlife to students. The BVA and AVS are working on specific advice for new graduates on managing student debt. We have also been looking at options for an EMS database to be made available to all students, and have published a database of veterinary-related charities that is available in the libraries of all the UK and Irish veterinary schools.

Most veterinary students from across the UK are also members of the NUS through membership of their student unions. The NUS works within the British trade union movement and represents around seven million students. If the BVU is looking for strength in numbers, I fear it will not outweigh such a well-established body as the NUS.

Although the AVS welcomes support for veterinary students, I am unsure what it is the BVU feels it can offer us that we do not already have. Personally, I doubt it will be able to offer us anything worth having if it launches having not first engaged in a dialogue with veterinary students on their needs.

Yours faithfully,

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